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SUBJECT: Researchers Assess Post-FARC Consolidation, Intelligentsia  
Skeptical

REF: BOGOTA 3262

Summary

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1. (U) On October 28, think tank New Rainbow Corporation and the Dutch Embassy held a public forum on the Integral Plan for the Consolidation of La Macarena (PCIM). La Macarena lacked a state presence for years and was the home base region of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Researcher Alejandro Reyes presented his findings that land issues --especially titling so that the small-scale farmers' property rights are protected-- and a social pact to strengthen institutions are vital to consolidation. The GOC lead coordinator for the PCIM defended the consolidation concept from skeptical civil society participants who clearly held an image of a militarized National Consolidation Plan (PNC). The GOC has identified the need for public outreach but will have a difficult time depoliticizing the message during an election season. The U.S. Embassy's Colombia Strategic Development Initiative (CSDI) working group, through USAID, is actively working to explore pilot projects to address land titling in consolidation zones. End Summary.

2. (U) Respected think tank New Rainbow Corporation and the Dutch Embassy co-sponsored an open forum to discuss the PCIM on October 28. The forum centered on the presentation of a policy paper authored by researchers Alejandro Reyes and Gustavo Duncan. The paper evaluates the PCIM's strategic results and offers recommendations to improve the PCIM and the national consolidation strategy in general. In attendance were academics, journalists, GOC officials, and the international community.

Property Rights for Local Community Essential During Transition

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3. (U) Reyes told the forum that resolving land issues is key to consolidation. The absence of land titles for small-scale farmers creates a dynamic of continuous settler migration to areas outside

of state control, thus expanding the conflict. These "colonists" move to areas lacking state presence where coca cultivation is their most lucrative productive option. Reyes added that rural farmers without formal ownership of land cultivate illicit crops for lack of access to legitimate credit and because the threat of land confiscation by the state means little.

¶4. (U) Lack of titles also exposes communities to exploitation by large land owners and outside investors when consolidation begins, according to Reyes. In conflict zones, illegal armed groups discourage land acquisition but paradoxically, as citizens benefit from improved security and the establishment of the state, they are also economically vulnerable. After coca crops are eradicated, the farmers, due to their loss of illicit income, may be compelled to sell their land, sometimes at one fifth of its actual value.

¶5. (U) Reyes argued that the GOC's agrarian policy favors large land owners and agricultural enterprises over smaller producers and that the Ministry of Agriculture has approached land titling in conflict zones with antipathy. He noted that the Minister of Agriculture has publicly alleged that farmers in the Macarena have guerrilla links and that granting titles would benefit the FARC. Reyes recommended that property rights for ordinary citizens be a top priority for government interventions in consolidation zones.

#### Social Pact Necessary to Strengthen Institutions

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¶6. (U) In the consolidation process, the community interacts directly with assistance programs supported by the Office of the President. Reyes explained that although this has weakened the role of traditional community organizations, municipal and departmental administrations, and other government institutions, it is necessary given the administrative and budgetary weakness of these entities and their history of cooption by illegal armed groups. Reyes concludes what is needed is a social pact between the national government and the local community to generate political will and energy to strengthen institutions as part of the consolidation process. This political energy needs to bring the entire government into the process, because Reyes says, "consolidation can't just be a small group of 'Quixotes' in a regional coordination center."

#### GOC Explains Structural Difficulties and the Role of Police

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¶7. (U) Alvaro Balcazar, the GOC lead coordinator of the PCIM, told the forum that it is difficult to extend the state presence of a democracy because democratic budgeting and decision-making structures are cumbersome. Balcazar added that he and his officials have no real authority and must make progress by influencing and persuading local actors such as municipal administrations. Conversely, municipal governments are the legitimate authorities but do not have adequate budgets and administrative capacity. As far as total social investment in the PCIM, Balcazar emphasized the GOC and local governments have provided the bulk of financing --approximately \$162 million of \$180 million total. International community support (about \$18 million) has provided the rapid and flexible spending necessary to bridge gaps between security advances and GOC intervention. Balcazar assured the group that this investment has made a significant impact in the PCIM communities.

18. (U) Balcazar noted complications when transitioning security responsibilities from the military to police. In consolidation zones, there is a natural tension between the rule of law and citizen safety. Police, when taking over a zone, must abide by judicial standards for evidence and prosecution when addressing threats to the citizenry, which at times has produced lack of confidence in the police for perceived ineffectiveness when the accused are released for failure to completely comply with legal requirements. However, Balcazar said progress is being made. In Vista Hermosa for example, the military gave way to tactical police units with assault rifles, who were then replaced by traditional police with pistols.

Civil Society Confronts GOC Official for Perceived PNC Militarization

19. (U) Academics and journalists vehemently confronted Balcazar about consolidation, which in their view was clearly a military strategy. One journalist said she believes that the Ministry of Defense is the center and lead of the PNC and doubted that the military would ever leave consolidation zones, including areas that have already been turned over to the police. She also questioned

whether citizens in consolidation zones had any political liberties. One academic railed against consolidation as a military imposition of rightist ideology on rural citizens. He even assailed the GOC National Parks representatives for wearing "military uniforms and not dressing as decent civilians." (Note: Parks personnel wear matching khaki pants and blue denim shirts with a park logo patch. End Note.) Another participant claimed that any civil society groups that have become allies of the state in consolidation zones were either bribed or infiltrated by state agents, and called the PNC the "National Bribery Plan."

Comment

10. (SBU) Despite the PNC's whole-of-government approach and emphasis on social development which would seemingly sell itself, the GOC has not done well explaining the plan to the public. Nor have they been able to articulate a clear definition of what "consolidation" means in the context of the PNC. This has led to misconceptions and distrust among Colombia's intelligentsia. New civilian PNC lead Diego Molano has recognized the problem and has prioritized the development of a public outreach campaign. This will be difficult during the election season, when any outreach from the presidency will be perceived as political campaigning. Reyes's identification of land issues as a top priority is congruent with thinking in the Embassy's Colombia Strategic Development Initiative (CSDI) working group. The CSDI is actively exploring USAID-led pilot projects and initiatives to improve land titling and alternative development in consolidation zones. The Ministry of Agriculture, a key agency in land titling, has been a reluctant interlocutor and generally absent from the PNC interagency coordinating process. End Comment.

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